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PATCH health fair to teach kids how to be healthier

Fourth grade students from Lewisville and Fort Lawn elementary schools will be encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles during a special health fair scheduled for May 15 at Lewisville Elementary School.

Several Chester area agencies are sponsoring the fair as part of an effort known as "PATCH" (Planned Approach to Community Health), a program developed by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta and being introduced in the state through the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control.

"The purpose of the PATCH program is to encourage a community to identify its leading health problems and then plan and implement activities to address those problems," said David McKeown, a health educator with the Catawba Public Health District.

"Our Chester PATCH Committee felt that one of the best ways to encourage healthier lifestyles was through the children who are very receptive to health education at the fourth grade level and who can hopefully encourage healthier habits at home as well," he added.

The health fair for Lewisville and Fort Lawn elementary school students, organized in cooperation with the Chester County School District, will include the following elements:

- Clemson Extension Service (Linda McCorkle) – personal hygiene, nutrition and safety.
- Hazel Pittman Center (Vivian Wiley) – alcohol and drug education.
- Chester County Hospital and Nursing Center (Mark Brock) – health care career opportunities.
- Springs Recreation Chester Complex (Glenn Cartrette) – activities for children.
- Catawba Public Health District (David McKeown) – general health education.
- Catawba Mental Health (Pam Williams) – stress management in young children.
- American Heart Association (Mary-Lloyd Lovelace) – heart healthy habits.
- American Lung Association (Ann Kearse) – encouraging non-smoking.
- American Cancer Society (Pat Howell) – common sense in the sun.

The fair will be organized in the Lewisville school cafeteria, with each agency staffing its own booth so that the children can move easily from one activity to another.

"We wanted to make the fair as much fun as possible," said Mark Brock, Chester PATCH Committee chairman.

"The fair will emphasize activities in which the kids can learn by doing, and we'll be providing some take-home items to help the children remember what they've learned."

The health fair at Lewisville school is being approached as a pilot effort by the PATCH Committee and may be offered to other elementary schools in the county this fall should the May 15 fair prove successful, Brock said.

"We wanted to begin with only two schools at first and see if our approach makes sense for the children," Brock said. "We feel that if we can begin to instill healthier habits at this age, they may last a life time."

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